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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [RS](#) [LG](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH SPEAKER EMSIS

Classified By: Ambassador Catherine Todd Bailey. Reason: 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Saeima speaker Indulis Emsis was optimistic that legislation authorizing the government to sign the border treaty with Russia would pass on February 1, but was skeptical that nationalist party Fatherland and Freedom could remain in the coalition after its opposition to this legislation. He was unwilling to discuss candidates for President, saying that public debate would only tarnish the reputation of the eventual winner and the coalition will make the choice. Despite prodding from the Ambassador, Emsis was strongly opposed to proposed legislation on restitution of Holocaust-era Jewish communal and heirless private property, suggesting that moving forward would only increase anti-Semitism in Latvia. He welcomed upcoming Embassy initiatives on energy and judicial issues and praised President Bush's recent comments on energy issues. End summary.

¶2. (U) Ambassador Bailey met January 30 with Speaker of Saeima (parliament) Indulis Emsis. Emsis was joined by his political advisor, Viesturs Silenieks and pol/econ chief accompanied Ambassador. Emsis, head of the green part of the Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS), previously served as Prime Minister in 2004 and was most recently chair of the national security committee of parliament. Emsis is able to carry on a conversation in English, but he sometimes has difficulty communicating or understanding nuance or technical points. For the first time in a meeting with the Ambassador, he had an interpreter (a perk available in his current position) although he used her only a fraction of the time, mainly to translate his remarks.

¶3. (C) Emsis predicted that the legislation to authorize the government to sign the border treaty would pass parliament on February 1 with about 60 votes. He said it was important that there be a full discussion in parliament of this issue and cautioned that the harder vote would be to pass the legislation on an urgent basis (which would allow passage of the bill in two vice three readings and reduce opportunities for amendments). Politically, he said, signing and eventual ratification of the border treaty would remove a key plank of ultra-nationalist parties in Latvia. In response to the Ambassador's question, Emsis predicted a challenge in the constitutional court to the treaty but would not speculate on its outcome.

¶4. (C) Looking ahead to the selection of a new president this summer, Emsis said we should expect very little public discussion. Past experience had shown that getting names of candidates out early only provided opportunities to attack them in the press and damage their reputations. In contrast to his call for openness on the border treaty, he said on presidential selection that "the coalition will decide and finito."

¶5. (C) Emsis opined that nationalist Fatherland and Freedom (TB) was not behaving as a good coalition partner, while the

other three members, ZZS, People's Party (TP) and First Party (LPP), who control 51 seats between them, worked well together since their days as a minority government prior to elections. TB was not being helpful on the border treaty and threatening to introduce amendments that would be unacceptable to Russia and end any chance of getting the treaty signed. They also regularly introduced legislation to remove local government officials who did not have fluent Latvian language skills. Emsis said this was impractical and unfair to populations in certain areas of the country where Latvian is the second language. It is one thing to disagree within government or even to abstain on certain issues, but to actively oppose was not proper for a party with ministerial responsibilities. TB needed to decide if it is an opposition party or a part of government. (Comment: Emsis isn't the only member of the coalition we've heard talk like this about TB recently, but the current parliamentary math complicates the timing and arrangements of any change in government. End comment.)

16. (C) Ambassador Bailey asked when the issue of restitution of Holocaust-era Jewish communal and heirless private property might come back to the parliament after it was rejected on a procedural motion in November. Emsis was categorical in rejecting the deal that had been negotiated between the government and the Jewish community. He said there could be no special treatment for any one group and claimed that he feared that passing the legislation that had been proposed would actually increase anti-Semitism in Latvia by providing special treatment for the Jewish community. He also claimed that a former colleague from the independence movement, herself a Jew, did not support the draft legislation and viewed it as divisive. Emsis said that perhaps the Jewish community needed better internal coordination on this issue. (Comment: The individual he

RIGA 00000086 002 OF 002

cited is indeed Jewish, but not an active member of the Jewish community here, which remains supportive of the deal negotiated last year. End comment.) Ambassador Bailey pushed back hard, noting that the proposal rejected by the parliament had been under discussion for a long time and it was facetious to claim it was all new. She urged the Speaker to bring the issue back for a thorough discussion in the Saeima and to respect the length of discussion on this issue.

17. (U) The Ambassador also briefed the Speaker on upcoming Embassy activities in the areas of energy and judicial affairs. He pledged his active support for both events. On energy, Emsis said that Latvia needed a serious discussion of conservation and renewable sources of energy as it faced for the first time serious questions about the stability of its energy supplies. He applauded President Bush's initiatives on energy announced in the State of the Union address.

18. (U) Emsis accepted the Ambassador's invitation to join her in a visit to the military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany, where a Latvian soldier injured in Iraq was undergoing treatment and rehabilitation following the amputation of his foot and provision of a prosthetic device.  
BAILEY